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Backyard wrestling finds a home and a following in Warwick

Posted Thursday, March 8, 2001 1:00 am

By MATTHEW FRANK

It's not quite the WWF, he's not Vince McMahon, and there is little exposure involved, but one thing is for certain, Ultimate Extreme Backyard Wrestling (UEBW) is here.

The UEBW is a small federation that airs Saturday nights at 11p.m. on Cox channel 18, and pits wrestlers of all ages against each other in professional style competition.

There are titles and belts to be won, there is independent competition as well as tag team match ups, the wrestlers have stage names, and each wrestler gets the chance to compete for the top spot.

Federation creator Howie Hauser said, "I came up with the idea, because I noticed most kids this age are either playing Playstation, or on the computer all night. They are not interested in any other kinds of sports, so I wanted to give them something else to be interested in. I built a ring in my back yard, and the rest is history." According to Hauser, the program is catching on. The UEBW has had a small but loyal fan following for the past three years, and many kids are taking an interest in competition. Hauser also believes that if wrestling remains as popular as it has been for the past few years, his federation will only increase in size.

There are currently 20 wrestlers on the UEBW roster who compete on Saturday afternoons. Hauser holds tryouts for new wrestlers every March.

Hauser bases his selection of wrestlers on performance at the tryouts and the level of interest displayed.

Hauser also stressed that those who make the cut have strict guidelines they must adhere to in order to stay on his active roster. A wrestler must maintain a certain grade point average. They can't get into any trouble at home or in the community, and must follow the federation's rules in the ring.

Punishments for rule breaking include parental conferences, suspension from wrestling, and dismissal from wrestling if behavior doesn't improve.

Safety is also of top concern, according to Hauser. The federation doesn't get involved in matches that can cause serious injury to a performer, and the entire federation is basically a staged choreographed show.

Hauser said, "We pay great attention to maintaining the wrestlers' safety. Each wrestler must get signed

parental approval, and we ask the parents to watch the tapes of the Saturday show, to see for themselves that there is no real danger.”

Wrestler Steve Perillo, also known as Draven, based on a character from the hit movie *The Crow*, said, “My father knows about it. He doesn't really mind that I do it, but he doesn't take a special interest in it either. He knows I won't get hurt. I've been doing this for three years now without injury, so I know he's not concerned.” Hauser and a few of the other wrestlers agree that before they got into wrestling, all they had in their lives was the computer and a Sony Playstation.

Perillo, who holds the Extreme TV Championship, said, “I never took much interest in the sports at school and what was going on. I spent a lot of time in front of the computer. I met Howie three years ago; he asked me to wrestle, and I've been involved ever since.”

Wrestlers Josh Hogan, also known as “Spirit,” and Mike Dowding, also known as “Rage,” have similar stories. They say that before wrestling came along they were loners who spent a lot of time on the computer.

The exposure may not be on a grand scale like the WWF. These kids will never be mistaken for “Stone Cold” Steve Austin or The Rock, but they say it's nice when a fan of the show recognizes them in the mall or when they're out with friends.

As for the exposure for the show itself, Hauser says he hopes it will grow along the same scale that professional wrestling did, being the top rated show on Monday nights, even beating out Monday Night Football.

He believes, if backyard wrestling is given a chance, it can become part of the mainstream, and net a much bigger fan base.

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